

Mountain goats thriving in local areas

By JOSEPHINE ZIMMERMAN
Herald Staff Writer

There's no evidence that Rocky Mountain goats have lived in Utah in the immediate historic past, but the goats transplanted into the Timpanogos and Lone Peak Wilderness areas seem to like their new homes.

Early historical reports talk about mountain goats, but they may have been confused with mountain sheep, according to Dave Stricklan, wildlife biologist with the Uinta National Forest's Pleasant Grove Ranger District.

There are no mountain sheep in this area; they are not compatible with domestic sheep, which carry diseases that attack the wild sheep.

Hikers in the popular wilderness area now have an opportunity to observe the agile goats.

During a recent helicopter flight, 76 of the goats were spotted in the Timpanogos area, an increase from the 30 to 40 spotted during 1991-92. Near Cascade Peak, 16 were spotted.

"They've built quite a trail system on top," said Stricklan. He said the goats are more acclimated to people in the Timpanogos area, but the goats on Lone Peak seem to be more wary.

Through a cooperative agreement, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is responsible for the animals, and the Forest Service is responsible for the habitat.

"Our goal is to maintain a manageable population that doesn't exceed the carrying capacity of the habitat," Stricklan said.

Together the agencies determine if the goat population is over-utilizing the habitat.

That has actually happened, so the Board of Big Game Control authorized the first Rocky Mountain Goat season in 1981, with one permit for a mature goat in the area between American Fork and Little Cottonwood canyons.

It was a "once in a lifetime" experience for the hunter who drew the lucky permit. Since then 11 hunts have been authorized in



Photo courtesy Rebecca Brighton

A Rocky Mountain goat chews on some vegetation. Transplanted Rocky Mountain goats are thriving in the local mountains.

the lone Peak area, and up to four permits authorized.

Because of concern that the goats might impact some sensitive plant species in their alpine habitat, two men were employed by the Forest Service during the summer of 1992 to install study plots and monitor possible effects of goat use on the sensitive Garrett's bladderpod, a small plant growing in the high areas.

"Goats don't eat the bladderpod, but the test plots did determine that the impact on vegetation was caused not by goats, but by humans," Stricklan said.

"Hikers in the wilderness cut trails, uproot plants and tramp down vegetation," he noted. He said more and more people are using the wilderness; in fact the numbers were startling over the recent Labor Day weekend.

The studies, in cooperation with the Division of Wildlife Resources, will determine if some of the goats should be transplanted to other areas in the state.

How they are transplanted is an area of controversy. Usually the goats are captured by use of a net gun shot from a helicopter, but environmentalists oppose the use of helicopters in the wilderness.

DWR first planted goats from the Cascade Range in Washington State to the north side of Little Cottonwood Canyon near the Twin Peaks area in 1967.

Only sporadic sightings of the six animals were reported until the early 1970s when they were observed wintering on the south side of Cottonwood Canyon. By 1981, the goat population in that area was estimated at around 60 animals.

In 1981, a small herd of 10 goats

was obtained from Olympic National Park and transplanted to Mt. Timpanogos. An additional 10 animals were received from the same source in 1982 and put on Mt. Olympus in the Neffs Canyon area.

In 1986, DWR captured six goats using a net gun and helicopter in the Lone Peak area and moved to the Tushar Range in central Utah. That same year a mature male goat was tranquilized on Mt. Timpanogos and moved to the Tushar Range to increase the probability of successful breeding in December. All seven animals were released in the Mt. Holly area, but soon scattered throughout the available habitat.

Since then eight goats were moved from the Lone Peak area to Bald Mountain in the Uintas.

Opinions

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The gripes just keep on coming

Gripes Column III. Relax, there's only one more to go.

"Doctors whose first act is to weigh you when you come in with a broken toe."

"People that don't have any children of their own but feel compelled to tell you

Mike Boyko



when you honk, they shoot you the finger."

"Somebody telling you a joke you told that same person last week."

"My gripe is the words 'quality education' as used by school board candidates